

PRAJÑĀ PĀRAMITĀ HRIDAYA SŪTRA (HEART SUTRA) AND ITS INFLUENCE ON NGUYEN DU'S SHINO POEMS *

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ABSTRACT

Although Nguyen Du was a Confucian scholar, his thoughts were influenced not only by Confucianism but also by other philosophical schools, including Zen Buddhism (Zen-shū 禅宗), especially by the thought of Mahāyāna Meditation through Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya Sūtra. This article would like to introduce Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya Sūtra and present its influences on Shino poems of the great poet, Nguyen Du, particularly thought of formlessness, unattachment, and transcendency in 'Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra' and the thought of emptiness nature in 'Prajnaparamitahridaya Sutra'.

KEYWORDS: Prajñā Sūtra System, Thought of Prajna Sutra, Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, Prajñāpāramitāhridaya Sutra, Shino Poem of Nguyen Du, Mahayana Buddhism & Zen

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INTRODUCTION

Although the great poet Nguyen Du (1765-1820) was Confucianist, he was not only absorbing Confucian thought but also was influenced by several other thoughts. Hence, his poems both reflect Confucian thought and harmonize other cultures and ideologies, including Zen Buddhism, which are manifested in the Prajnaparamita Hridaya Sutra. The great poet was deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism with the philosophy of Emptiness, Formlessness, Unattachment and Transcendence. This article will present the mentioned issue in order to specify that Nguyen Du was an academics understanding deeply Zen Buddhism and a religious meditator.

AN OVERVIEW ABOUT PRAJNAPARAMITAHRIDAYA SUTRAS AND THEIR THOUGHT

In the *tripiṭaka* system (*i. e. sūtripiṭaka, vinayapiṭaka and abhidharma*) of Buddhism, *Prajna* is also called *prajñāpāramitā* that is used to refer to all sutras belonging to Prajna system, in order to distinguish it from other sutras, such as Nikaya or Āgama written in Sanskrit and Shino language, *buddhāvataṃsaka-mahāvaiṣṭyasūtra*, *Mahā ratna kūṭa-sūtra*, etc. Among Shino Sutras, based on our statistics, *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras comprise 41 sets and are distributed in 777 books (1).

Among Prajna sutras, *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* or Vajara Sutra or Mahā Prajnaparamitahridaya simply called Prajna are two most popular sutras in Vietnam and in China which every Buddhist and meditator reads and learns by heart.

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When we talk about thought of Mahayana Buddhism we refer to Prajna system, because, if there were no Prajna sutra, there would be no Mahayana thought. Originated from this system, right since the second conference afterwards (about 100 years after Buddha got nirvana, i. e. around the 4th century BC), Buddhism was divided into different branches and schools, including Mahayana Buddhism, which caused another problem, though this relates to Prajna sutra and others deeply. In here, Prajna was the source from which Mahayana thought and Vajrayana Buddhism came into being. Bat-nha is a Shino name transcribed from Sanskrit word Prajna meaning intellect, knowledge or perfect wisdom. However, whatever is used to translate it, none of them can reflect all the figurative and implied meaning of Prajna in Sanskrit, as this word refers to the very perfect wisdom. Only this wisdom can avoid any misconception.

In Prajna, Buddha presented on the meaning of Emptiness doctrine, i. e. the theory of Emptiness. Reading Ārya Dharma, the translated work of lord Dānapāla in Āgama of Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 02, he lectured on tenure of the Emptiness as follow:

“Monks! Emptiness does not have possession, nor delusions, neither starting point nor ending point, but it is transparent in every cognitive relation.

Why? As Emptiness does not depend on space, nor forms, it is beyond memory, it does not depend on its birthplace, it is out of referential understanding and it transcends all problems, which make it harmonize all dharmas...”
(2)

And in Cūlasunnata sutta of Pali sutra, Majjhima Nikaya 3, Buddha talked about the staying of Emptiness as follow:

“Ananda, after getting nirvana, we will stay in the ever emptiness. Therefore, Ananda, you all need to train yourselves.” (3)

Readers also encounter this idea in Samyutta-Nikāya 2. Nearly two thirds of this sutra lectured on tenets of Interdependence and Selflessness; and in Samyutta-Nikāya 3, half of this sutra teaches about tenets of Panca Skhandhah and Selflessness. Hence, these tenets are implemented fully by Prajna sutra with large scale and deep sense in terms of its emptiness meaning, especially vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra 5 in Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 5 translated by Xuán Zàng mentioned twenty meanings of Emptiness, in which Sarva-dharmā is not the emptiness of all dharma; *nāvadhāryate* is the emptiness of what cannot be perceived, nor be touched; nonquality is the emptiness of what is formless. These are types of emptiness which Prajna implemented fully and deeply the emptiness meaning of the tenets of interdependence, anitya, anātman which are described in Āgama and Nikāya

The tenets of Āgama and Nikāya most focus on anātman; however, the tenets of Prajna not only describe the tentative existence but also sunyatā of atman and dharma fully.

Tentative existence or Ātman meaning emptiness is also called the foundation that is the five aggregates making human beings or all beings, in which they all do not have atman so called emptiness.

Dharma or Dharmakaya i. e. Emptiness means that the five aggregates do not have self form and in each aggregate does not have it, either. The smallest form of an aggregate corresponds the pratīyasamutpāda, it does not have the dharmakaya; and idea is the smallest of form of mind, which corresponds with the pratīyasamutpāda, mind does not have particular dharmakaya, so it is called Dharma i. e. Emptiness.

It is to say the thought of Prajna discusses the philosophy of empty nature that is to be recognized as Emptiness, the Untrue i. e. Organic outstanding vacuum. This emptiness is beyond forms, emptiness, existence and nonexistence, i. e. transcendence, manifesting the nature, the permanent thusness.

Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita was taught lately in the system of prajna by Buddha. According to Vasubandhu, (316-396), a very outstanding Buddhist commentator of sarvāstivādin and vijñānavādin of Indian Buddhism in 4th century A. D., the writer of abhidharmakośa, Vidyāmātra – Vimsatisastra and Vidyāmātra – Vimsatisastra, he claimed that this Dharma had been taught for the first time by Buddha in Rājagaha, starting at the fifth year since Buddha got enlightenment and Vajracchedika had been taught lately in the system of prajna. Vasubandhu said that among sutras of prajna before Vajracchedika, Buddha taught how to eliminate “forms” but not completely, not until Buddha taught Vajracchedika, this problem had been eliminated totally. In here, Buddha wanted to use the wisdom sword to cut every attachment of forms. That is to claim that prajñāpāramitā or perfection of wisdom/insight had been taught lately in Prajna system. (4)

In Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā sūtra, through a conversation with Subhoti, Buddha delivered a lecture on the nothingness of all dharmas, then he summarized it in a short stanza: All the dharmas are temporary/ as a dream/untrue/as water bubble, as an image/ as dew and a lightning/[you all should consider as such].

When understanding the meaning of the empty nature, a practitioner will discern that all dharmas are temporary, non-self; he will gain the spirit of unfearing, beyond the temptation of worldly wealth and love, equanimity which Ven. Van Hanh (938 – 1025) of Pre-Le dynasty and Ly dynasty had gained. It was Ven. Van Hanh who had mentioned this thought which had its origin from a stanza of *Vajracchedikā* as mentioned above advising his students before he died. Ven. Van Hanh said that: Human body is temporary just like a lightning/ as trees and flowers in spring, and they are withered in autumn./ Despite good or bad life, you should not be afraid of,/because goodness or badness [is also temporary] as a dew [attaching] on grass. (5)

Understanding the meaning of emptiness, a practitioner will get the insight of non-attachment spirit. At this moment, his mind will release everything, non-curiosity, non-attachment, indifference in anything. The statement “You should practice the spirit of non-attachment to anything and live with it” had been mentioned several times in the sutra when Buddha was talking to Subhoti, it proves the role and vital position of non-attachment which Buddha emphasized. This spirit was perceived deeply by Hui Neng, a poor logger. When he was selling his woods, hearing an elite man read Vajracchedikā, by his spiritual intuition, he perceived the nature of thing, then, after that the elite man answered and advised the patriarch to preach this sutra, he went home to arrange his neighbors to take care of his parents, he went to Hoang Mai mountain to meet Hoang Nhan, the fifth patriarch. In the dialogue, the fifth patriarch said: “You are from Linh Nam, the rural area, coming here to learn Buddhism, aren’t you?” Hui Neng answered: Human beings are from the North or the South, but Buddha nature is not North nor South. My body and your body are not the same, but our Buddha nature is not different.” Especially, through his stanza which he asked somebody to write on the cliff beside Than Tu’s stanza, readers knew that Hui Neng deeply perceived the spirit of non-attachment, formlessness, and transcendence. This story was written in Phap Ban Dan Kinh (法寶壇經) as follow: when the fifth patriarch knew he was going to die, he asked his followers to present him a shelf so that he could do the lineage of his bowl and drapery to inherit and develop the Zen Buddhism and the lineage of the wisdom light, Ven. Than Tu presented a stanza: “The body is like a bodhi tree, mind is like a bright mirror station./ Always clean it,/ do not let it dirty. The fifth patriarch commented that if we followed this stanza, we would perceive our self-nature in one day. All followers at Hoang Mai Mountain read and learned by heart.

After that, when cooking in the kitchen to serve the followers, Hui Neng listened to Than Tu's stanza, he asked someone to take him to the sanctum to worship the stanza. Then he asked that person to write his stanza on the cliff (he was illiterate). Hui Neng's stanza was as follow: Bodhi is not a tree,/ Bright mirror is not a station./ If there had been no thing,/ Where would dust attach?. Thanks to this stanza, Hui Neng was chosen for the lineage, bowl and draspery to continue the Zen Buddhism and became the sixth patriarch of bodhidharma's Zen school. The fifth patriarch taught Vajracchedikā to Hui Neng when he had heard the stanza "You should practice the spirit of non-attachment to anything and live with it" for the second time, Hui Neng suddenly got wisdom, then he presented to the fifth patriarch another stanza. (6)

The thought of non-attachment of *Vajracchedikā* had been perceived by king-meditator Tran Thai Tong. Following the advice of national master Vien Chung "There is no Buddha in mountain, but rather in our mind", Tran Thai Tong left Yen Tu mountain to come back to his crown, both governed and meditated, studied doctrines, especially *Vajracchedikā* and got wisdom thanks to this sutra. This was written in the book "Thien tong chi nam tu": I used to read *Vajracchedikā* upto "You should practice the spirit of non-attachment to anything and live with it – do not arise ideas in the located position", hardly had he sung the stanza when he got enlightened, he immediately used his wisdom to compose this stanza naming 'Thien tong chi nam'. (7)

If in *Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā* sutra, Buddha taught about thought of nonattachment, formlessness and emptiness, in *Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra*, Gautama only taught the rational of empty nature, which was reflected in the dialogue between Buddha and Sariputra retelling that while practicing *Prajna*, Quan Tu Tai Bodhisattva got enlightened to perceive that everything is empty.

Prajñāpāramitāhridaya Sutra teaching the core of enlightened wisdom is usually called The Heart Sutra and the shortest text representing the core meaning of *Prajñāpāramitā*. This Sutra contains only 262 letters, including the title which covers the thought of 41 *Prajna* set about 777 books and they have been read by Buddhist followers as they are supplemental Suttas.

In the Sutra, Buddha taught that when Quan Tu Tai Bodhisattva practiced *Prajñāpāramitāhridaya*, he perceived the five aggregates (Form, feeling, perception, conception, consciousness) to be empty, immediately he overcame all sufferings.

Therefore, according to the Sutra, if any practitioner meditates and perceives that the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, conception, consciousness) to be empty like Ven Quan Tu Tai, he eliminates self-attachment, hence getting enlightened, manifesting Buddha nature, meaning obtaining nirvana. Why? In order to make it clearer, it should be started from the concept 'Five aggregates'.

Five aggregates is the five groups that make a human body. The word 'aggregate' was translated by Xuán Zàng from skandha in Sanskrit. Before it was translated as 'am' (covery) by Ven La Thap. Previous translators called it 'they' meaning integration of many elements. The product of the five aggregates is called beings. In other words, human beings are product of the five aggregates. Among primitive sutras, Buddhism had already confirmed non-self nature of these five aggregates. That every aggregate has non-self is a subject of *Prajna*. According to the thought of *Prajna*, no aggregate of the five aggregates has their own self and not having their own self means non-self, i. e. emptiness; every aggregate of that set is non-self meaning absolute Dharma. Both nature and dharma is nothingness, which is the content of emptiness meaning of *Prajna*.

Among the five aggregates, form aggregate reflects the four elements i. e. earth, water, wind and fire integrating with twelve links in order to generate a human being. Feeling aggregate reflects senses including every low psychological activity of human beings. Perception aggregate reflects thoughts including every high psychological activity. Conception aggregate refers to the will including instinct and willing activities. Conception is a vestige of past karma which is being created governing human beings' activities; it plays the most important role in human life. Consciousness aggregate refers to perception including all knowledge of recognition both inside and outside of a person. Among the mentioned five aggregates above, form aggregate belongs to forms and the rest belong to mind. Form and mind create a human being, which hence is known as the body of five aggregates.

According to the ancient Indian religion and philosophy, in the body of five aggregates there is atman which is stable and is not governed by impermanent law. However, this is explained differently by Buddhism. Buddhist thought was based on the generated links so as to emphasize non-self and deny that atman theory. After A-Ty-Dam schools belonging to Sthaviravāda appeared, non-self theory became more and more popular though it was confined in the theory of human beings with non-self. Not until it was explained by Prajna of Mahayana thought, did non-self cover all i. e. Non-self Dharma.

The core of Dharma taught by Buddha is summarized in the *Pratītyasamutpāda*, *dvādaśāṅgapratītyasamutpāda*. Buddhism is different from other pantheon religions in this point. When we believe in the generated links we do not believe in any Creator. The generated links theory plays a part in Buddhist philosophy, which covers all the Buddha's teachings. If there were no generated links theory, there would be no Buddhism; similarly, if there were no Prajna, there would be no Mahayanism as mentioned above. Buddhism with the conception of pantheism originated from *Pratītyasamutpāda*.

When accepting the A-lai-da, it is to accept the two theories linked with it i. e. non-self and impermanent theory. The effect of impermanent is sufferings. While phenomena of non-self themselves are empty. It needs mentioning again that Emptiness means there is no form. From things that can be seen to thinking ideas do not have forms though they appear as though human beings have seen, heard and have been aware of. That appearance is due to *pratītyasamutpāda* i. e. conditions compose together, there is no self though it is the self of intentionality or accidentality. Intentional non-self is called Human non-self; and, accidental non-self is called non-self dharma. In other words, all things including human beings are non-self. Prajna school theorized these two non-selves i. e. human non-self and non-self of things in order to establish Emptiness theory proving that Prajna philosophy is achieved by religion studies of real practicing method in order to liberate from sufferings.

The above sutra paragraph mentions that the five aggregates are empty, i. e. mentioning this as non-self of human and dharma is the content of Prajna Emptiness. With the Emptiness, non-self theory, one of the two theories of A-lai-da has been implemented and elucidated fully. This non-self theory is not only a pure philosophical concept but it also reflects lively reality achieved by contemplative intuition meaning by practicing to get wisdom. Therefore, it reflects that the five aggregates all are empty.

During meditating, if practitioner perceives that all is impermanent, non-self, he gets enlightened, reaching nirvana. At this moment, practitioner will recognize the spirit of neutral between aggregates and emptiness, in which form and emptiness are the same, united, and so are the left four aggregates, identical, they are in the same form: "Form is not different from emptiness, the latter is identical to the former, form means emptiness, the latter means the former, and so are

feeling, perception, conception and consciousness.” This unification determines the truth that though it is two but becomes one, and though it is one but two, they reflect both non-self and impermanent. In other words, that unification manifests impermanent but unique nature of every phenomenon. This is the duality principle. Because the five aggregates i. e. human beings are considered to be non-self, every aggregate is also non-self. With the conception that self and dharma are empty, Mahayana Prajna thought implemented non-self fully and completed Emptiness theory, which made way for several other thoughts to continue. Hence, we can conclude that Prajna thought is the cradle of all Mahayana Sutras.

According to Prajna spirit, “all phenomena in the objective world do not have forms or shapes nor are to be born, do not disappear, get dirty nor are clean, do not add into them nor deduce from them”. And “hence in empty nature there is no form, feeling, perception, conception nor consciousness; there is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; there is no sight, sound, fragrance, taste, touch, sense; there is no sight morality, and there is no reason morality. There is no ignorance, there is no end of non-ignorance, there is no old age and death, and there is no end of old age and death; there is no suffering, dvādaśanidāna, nirvana, Eight fold path, there is no wisdom nor enlightenment. The thought empty nature has explained completely the issue, deny anything as everything is impermanent, non-self, formless. Self and Dharma are empty.

The sutra was ended by a mantra sentence: Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate; Bodhi-svāha! This issue cannot be explained nor discussed, each of us can only enlighten it by empiricism, meditation, practice to perceive the truth and reach liberation, get out of sufferings, rebirth in the six paths.

The core meaning of Prajna thought as mentioned above has deeply influenced meditator society and East Asia literature. Similarly, in Vietnam, this thought not only influences monks but also Confucian scholars, including Nguyen Du.

PRAJNA THOUGHT IN NGUYEN DU’S SHINO POEMS

As mentioned above, Nguyen Du’s thought not only reflects Confucianism but it also manifests other philosophies including meditation school. For example, in his poems, Nguyen Du used to mention the love to unhappy people, especially talented but unlucky individuals, to whom the love fused between forgiveness, benevolence, tolerance and deep humanity of Buddhism with humanitarian and compassionate spirits of Vietnamese nation. Look at some of the great writer’s works, we can see that:

In Kieu Story, through talented but unlucky Thuy Kieu’s troublesome and unhappy fate, Nguyen Du claimed that Kieu’s sufferings were due to God will, karma, etc. He understood the “fate”, “karma” simply in accordance with the people’s understanding, which was not as deep as understood in Buddhist teachings and so were mind training and goodwill. It should be emphasized that regarding the sympathy with unhappy people in general, with talented but unlucky women such as Thuy Kieu, Dam Tien in Kieu Story, female singer of Long Thanh land or Tieu Thanh in his Shino poems in particular, this love and sympathy of the great writer originated from the Viet’s kindness and Buddhism’s benevolence, but it did not come from Confucianism which looked down women with concept “having only one son means having children, but having ten daughters means no children at all” or “women and kids are difficult to teach – Thien Duong Hoa”, though Confucianism highly valued benevolence morality and respect morality and considered high valuable conduct of gentlemen. However, this concept reflects social structure and this is the conduct of high-class people. The Confucian scholars’ love for unhappy people in general is another issue, because it manifests the convergence and

acculturation of different cultural thoughts to form human characters not only from Confucianism one.

In Shino poems, we can see that Nguyen Du more and more recognized Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, especially Prajna, empty nature, non-attachment, Thusness. Here, Nguyen Du was said to be a layman, a meditator who perceived Ly's Zen school. In the text for ten types of beings, the writer's mind and heart were that of a Bodhisattva, non-self, tolerance, benevolence to all worldly unhappy people.

The following poems should be read carefully in order to confirm that Nguyen Du was influenced deeply by empty nature philosophy, formlessness, non-attachment of Prajna, especially *Vajracchedikā* and *Prajñāpāramitāhridaya Sutra*.

In To Nhu's three collections of poems, we found five poems which directly reflect the writer's inspiration of temples and Zen Buddhism.

In *Vong Thien Thai tu* of the collection of Nam Trung songs, with the perspective of a writer from a distance viewing the ancient temple on Thien Thai mountain located in the east of Hue Palace behind the shadow of autumn leaves, where there was an old monk of previous dynasty under the white cloud, the writer reflected his feeling, thinking of time, his love for himself while he was old, he was still in troubles (8); similarly, *Vong Tuong Son tu* of the *Bac hanh tap luc* collection with the perspective viewing the temple scene from a distance where Xuán Zàng's ash was kept, the writer reflected his perception of time (9), however, until when the poems of *De Nhi Thanh Dong*, *Dao y*, *Luong Chieu Minh thai tu phan kinh thach dai* were composed Zen thought was completely manifested.

First of all will be Composing at Nhi Thanh cave (*De Nhi Thanh Dong*) in the collection of *Thanh Hien tien hau* poem:

*Bàn Cổ sơ phân bất ký niên,
Sơn trung sinh quật, quật sinh tuyền.
Vạn ban thủy thạch thiện đại xảo,
Nhất lập càn khôn khai tiểu thiên.
Mãn cảnh giai không hà hữu tướng,
Thử tâm thường định bất ly thiền.
Đại sư vô ý diệc vô tận,
Phủ thán thành trung đa biến thiên.*

(Composing at Nhi Thanh Cave: Many years since Ban Co times, in mountain there is a cave, in cave there is a stream. Every stream and rock is arranged beautifully, it opens a small sky. All scenes are empty, hence is there no form? This mind is pure, and does not separate from meditation. Buddha was without thinking and also endless, seeing in the palace there were changes, so feeling pitied)

Under the poet's eye, Nhi Thanh cave scene since the past has been created beautifully just like a small sky: in mountain there is a cave, in the cave there is a stream, stream and rock are arranged skillfully. Viewing the scene, the poet wondered: all scenes are empty, whether there is form? Then he talked about himself: this mind is pure, does not separate

from meditation. The thought of the mentioned stanzas shows that the poet had already perceived the essence, thusness of all dharma. In here, the doctrine of Formless, Empty nature, Thusness taught by Buddha was perceived completely by the poet.

It is clear that if there is no external scene, there is no form. And if there is no form, what do people rely on to be aware to differentiate and treat? This poet's perception more or less was identical with that of Hui Neng about empty nature in the stanza: Bodhi is not a tree, mirror is not a station. So far there has been nothing, where does dust stick on? In term of doctrine and things, in term of form and shape, in this objective world, if there were nothing, where dust would stick on! When perceiving the doctrine of empty nature, the practitioner's mind will be pure, quiet. That is the pure mind which does not separate from meditation. Meditation is a method to be practiced in order to make the mind pure, empty. Meditation and purity become linked together.

Buddhism in general, Zen Buddhism in particular focuses on mind. Meditation helps the mind pure. The purer the mind is, the wiser the empirical perception will. The practitioner becomes pure, unchanged, stabled during meditation, he gets enlightened. That mind is Buddha just as Ven Vien Chung advised Tran Thai Tong king when the king left for Yen Tu mountain to seek for Buddha: when you know your pure mind, that is Buddha. Similarly, in the last stanza of Cu Tran Lac Dao phu, Tran Nhan Tong Buddha king highly valued the pure mind i. e. emptiness: Standing in front of scene our mind is pure and empty, that is meditation. If that pure mind is blown by eight winds, it is unchanged. This poet's pure, quiet, unchanged mind is encountered in the poem Dao y:

Minh nguyệt chiếu cổ tỉnh,

Tĩnh thủy vô ba đào.

Bất bị khiên nhân xả,

Thử tâm chung bất dao.

(The moon light shines an old well, the well water does not wave. Not being stirred, this mind does not change.)

And if being stirred, this mind may change a little then stable again. Because the poet's mind always:

Trạm trạm nhất phiến tâm,

Minh nguyệt cổ tỉnh thủy.

(The mind is as pure as the moon light and the well water)

By using metaphor as often seen in Buddhist sutras, the poet compared his mind as pure and quiet as an old well's water and as bright as the moon light. That mind never changes just as the water does not wave, but if it waves, it will become stable again and so the poet Nguyen Du's mind was, i. e. the enlightened mind, the Buddha mind.

Finally, that is Luong Chieu Minh thai tu phan kinh Phat dai in Bac hanh tap luc collection. The poem was composed when the poet was sent to China as the chief Ambassador in 1813-1814. When the delegation walked past the stone memorial statue of Chieu Minh prince of Luong dynasty, the poet remembered the story and got inspiration to compose this poem (10).

Opening the poem, Nguyen Du wrote:

*Lương triều Chiêu Minh thái tử phân kinh xứ,
Thạch đài do kí “Phân kinh” tự.
Đài cơ vu một vũ hoa trung,
Bách thảo kinh hàn tận khô tử.
Bất kiến di kinh tại hà sở.”*

(Where Chieu Minh prince interpreted sutras/ The stone statue was with an inscription sutra interpretation/
Deserted ground was full of wild flowers under the rain/ The dry grass died of coldness/ There was no vestige of the sutras)

According to *A-lai-da theory* of Buddhism, integration and disintegration of everything in this objective world is due to *Pratītyasamutpāda*. If there is *Pratītyasamutpāda* there is integration, if there is no *Pratītyasamutpāda*, there is disintegration. Under Nguyen Du's eye, it was the case of kingdom division statue of Chieu Minh prince. The poet visited this place seeing the ground with full of wild flowers, died-of-coldness grass, he did not see any text, but only two words “kingdom division” being faded away on the stone. That was what the poet saw, how about what he heard? The poet knew that when the prince was young, he loved literature and poems and he interpreted doctrines, but this caused confusion to the later generations.

*Vãng sự không truyền Lương Thái tử.
Thái tử niên thiếu nịch u văn,
Cường tác giải sự đồ phân phân.*

Hearing Luong prince, when he was alive, he loved literature, unwilling to interpret made confusion.)

According to the poet, this was a clinging work encountered with Buddha's liberated religion. Hence, he condemned the ignorant deed of Luong Vu De king and his son:

*Phật bản thị không, bất trước vật,
Hà hữu hồ kinh an dụng phân.
Linh văn bất tại ngôn ngữ khoa,
Thục vi Kim Cang, vi Pháp Hoa.
Sắc không cảnh giới mang bất ngộ,
Si tâm quy Phật Phật sinh ma.
Nhất môn phụ tử đa giao tế.*

(Buddha is empty in nature, non-attachment, so is there any sutra to be interpreted? What holy texts are due to language/ What are Vajracchedikā, Lotus sutra? Arupaloka is not clear, Mind desired Buddha, Buddha became ghost. Father and son of a family all were ignorant or blind.)

According to Mahayana thought, especially Prajna ones, things or mind all are illusive. In term of form, they are illusive; in term of nature, they are empty, because they all depend on predestination. In here, Poet Nguyen Du mentioned

the thusness. All is nothing. Prajna claimed that “All dharma is formless, non-arising, non-dying, non-composing, non-increasing, non-reducing” as mentioned in the above section. All dharma is nothing, what people depend on and attach? Even Buddha is all empty, so are sutra and doctrines. It was Buddha who taught in Vajracchedikā: “It is necessary to know that I talk about Dharma as if a boat took people past a river. Main Dharma must be left out, so is non-dharma”. Texts are empty, what people use to interpret? In nature, in form, all shapes are illusive. Also in Vajracchedikā, it was Buddha who advised followers to introspect as such: All dharma is unreal, as a dream, bubbles, pictures, dew and lightning, [you all] should consider like that. Owing to perceiving empty nature of Prajna, when visiting the stone statue, the poet criticized the wrong and ignorant deed of Luong king and his son. According to the poet, this deed did not bring any benefits. Chieu Minh only perceived Buddha through form, but not the core of the doctrine taught by Buddha and written in the sutra; hence, the prince interpreted it, which caused more ignorance to followers. In the poet’s words, the holy texts did not rely on language. Therefore, the holy texts were mainly the core content of thought, so it should not depend on the words of sutras. Writing so far, I just remember the teachings of Hui Neng in Phap Bao Dan sutra: “One day, Hui Neng was teaching, Vi Thu Su asked Hui Neng: Student heard that when Dat Ma educated Luong Vu king. Vu De asked: “I spent my whole life building temples, worshipping shanga, denotation, what conduct would I get?” The sixth Dat Ma taught: “No conduct you would get”. Student did not understand this idea, resected Ven made clear it for me. Dat Ma said “No conduct, do not suspect the words of Saint. Because Vu De had bad mind, hence he did not perceive the main Dharma. Building temples, worshipping shanga, donation were for good luck and prosperity, they could not be used to seek for good conduct. Good conduct is in the true body of Dharma, but not in good deeds for prosperity. (11)

Through this criticism, the readers are clear that Nguyen Du not only understood deeply Mahayana thought and the core content of Prajna, but he also perceived the history of lineage of Zen school with Don Ngo method and he practiced meditation daily. Thanks to perceiving Mahayana thought in Lotus sutra about the First Dharma, cause and effect and Vajracchedikā with empty thought, non-attachment, transcendency, Nguyen Du applied ancient reference in his poem with art intention seeing an application of ancient reference as a means to eliminate estimated forms in order to focus on the nature, the real forms of dharma, leaving distinction, thinking, attachment to reach enlightenment. According to Nguyen Du, if we were ignorant to follow Buddha, Buddha would become ghost. When people are not enlightened, they live in illusive world; every thinking, idea arising are illusive. According to Buddhism, the illusive world is the ghostly world! This is a cause of sufferings. If you want to overcome sufferings to obtain happiness, i. e. nirvana in your present life, the only way is the Eight fold path.

Owing to deep recognition of prajna thought, and although the poet himself had read the sutra thousands of times, he did not perceive the meaning the sutra; eventually, when recalling the enlightened stanza of Hui Neng, the poet perceived that only the pure mind could the doctrine of dharmas, because “Sutra without scriptures is holy one”.

Ngô văn Thế tôn tại Linh Sơn,

Thuyết pháp độ nhân như Hằng hà sa số.

Nhân liễu thử tâm, nhân tự độ,

Linh Sơn chỉ tại nhữ tâm đầu.

Mình kính diệc phi đài,

Bồ đề bản vô thụ.

Ngã độc Kim cang thiên biến linh,

Kỳ trung áo nghĩa đã bắt mình.

Cập đảo phân kinh thạch đài hạ,

Tài tri vô tự thị chân kinh.

(I heard that Buddha taught and educated as many followers as sands in Gange River. Those who understand mind means they themselves enlighten, Linh Thu is only in people's heart. Mirror is not a station, Bodhi is not a tree. When arriving the Sutra interpreting Statue, I came to know that sutra without scripture is holy one.)

Nguyen Du said that he had read Vajracchedikā thousands of times, but he did not understand its meaning, according to me, that is only his humble behavior, because the words in his several poems as discussed above show that Nguyen Du deeply perceived Zen Buddhism, especially Prajna, empty nature of all dharma, non-attachment, existence and non-existence. Hence, the poet's mind was pure, quiet, non-attached. It can be said that Nguyen Du was not only a Confucian scholar, but he was also a meditator layman, who more or less perceived Zen Buddhism and its doctrine.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be said that Dong Do Zen School from Bodhidharma to Dao Tin focused on *Lankavatara sutra* with the thought highly valuing quietness, upto Hoang Nhan time, he taught *Prajnaparamitahridaya sutra* in addition to *Lankavatara sutra*, however, Hui Neng only focused on the spirit of *Prajnaparamitahridaya sutra*, highly valued Formlessness, non-attachment, Emptiness helping practitioners get enlightenment.

Thought of Emptiness exceeding above Yes and No of the Prajñā scriptures has profoundly influenced Vietnamese literature in medieval times. And this idea not only affects the poetic contexts of the Zen masters, but also affects the poetry of the Confucian school of this period. The reason for such a profound influence is because: Firstly, Buddhism Meditation was introduced to Vietnam very early, probably from the time of Asoka in the 3rd century B. C, then shortly after Buddhism with the system of Mahayana sutras, the Zen of Buddhism in South India was transmitted into Vietnam, mainly the Prajñā scriptures discussing ideological Emptiness. Secondly, Vietnamese Zen meditation in the later period is influenced by the Enlightenment Meditation of Hui Neng, but the Sixth Patriarch only focuses on preaching the ideological essence of the graceful and devious *Prajnaparamitahridaya Sutras* that featured Emptiness.

Meditation does not focus on language, because the policy of 'inadequate writing', only focuses on the mind: 'the mind of the mind', with the mind and the method of 'direct intuition' to enter the dark truth. Therefore, Zen Buddhism often promotes silence, non-verbalness, i. e, but if the Buddha did not use language to interpret, how can He lead his disciples to go to the shore of liberation and peace?

This article has used many words to explain and analyze in order to prove that poet Nguyen Du was influenced by the thought of the Prajñā scriptures, thus contrary to the spirit of Zen Buddhism. Through the process of meditation, reflection, contemplation and spiritual intuition, readers will perceive Meditation in Nguyen Du's poem more deeply.

Glossary

- In order to help the readers to understand the issues systematically, I would like to provide Prajna in Shino Sutra as follow:
 - Mahà-Prajñapàramità- Sùtra, 600 books, was divided into 3 parts (each part contains 200 books), in Shino sutra registered as 0220, translated by Xuán Zàng. Ven Thich Tri Nghiem translated 11 books.
 - Phong Quang Prajñapàramità- Sùtra, 20 books, registered as 0221, Shino version was translated by Vo La Xoa of Tan dynasty.
 - Quang tan Sutra, 10 books, registered as 0222, Shino version was translated by Truc Phap Ho of Tay Tan dynasty.
 - Mahà-Prajñapàramità- Sùtra, 27 books, registered as 0223, Shino version was translated by Cuu MA LA Thap of Post Tan. Vietnamese version was fully translated by Ven. Thich Tri Tinh.
 - Dao Hanh Prajna Sutra, 10 books, registered as 0224, Shino version was translated by Chi Lau Ca Sam of Post han dynasty.
 - Dai Minh Do sutra, 6 books, registered as 0225, Shino version was translated by Ngo Chi Khiem.
 - Sao Maha-Prajna Sutra, 5 books, registered as 0225, Shino version was translated by Dam Ma Ty and Truc Phat Niem of Pre-Tan dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Ven. Thich Nu Tam Thuong.
 - Minor Prajñapàramità- Sùtra, 10 books, registered 0227, Shino version was translated by Cuu Ma La Thap of Post Tan. Vietnamese version was translated by Chau Lam (Tue Quang) temple.
 - -Buddha lectured on Phat Mau xuất sinh Tam Phap tang Prajñapàramità- Sùtra, 25 books, registered 0228, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Monk Thich Tu Chieu of Chau Lam (Tue Quang) temple.
 - Buddha lectured on Phat Mau Bao Duc tang Prajñapàramità- Sùtra, 3 books, registered as 0229, Shino version was translated by Phap Hien of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Chau Lam (Tue Quang) temple.
 - Thánh Bát thiên tụng Bát nhã Ba la mật đa Nhất bách bát danh chân thật viên nghĩa Đà la ni kinh, 1 book, registered as 0230, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Huyen Thanh.
 - Thắng Thiên vương Bát nhã Ba la mật kinh, 7 books, registered as 0231, Shino version was translated by Nguyen Ba Thu Na of Tran dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Chau Lam (Tue Quang) temple.
 - Văn Thù Sư Lợi sở thuyết Ma ha Bát nhã Ba la mật kinh, 2 books, registered as 0232, Shino version was translated by man Da La Thien of Luong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Chau Lam (Tue Quang) temple; another version translated by Ven. Thich Minh Le.

- Văn Thù Sư Lợi sở thuyết Bát nhã Ba la mật kinh, 1 book, registered as 0233, Shino version was translated by Tang Ca Ba La Luong.
- Phật thuyết Nhu Thủ Bồ tát Vô thượng Thanh tịnh phân vệ kinh, 2 books, registered as 0234, Shino version was translated by Tuong Cong of Tong dynasty.
- Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita, 1 book, registered 0235, Shino version was translated by Cuu Ma La Thap of Post tan dynasty. In Vietnam, there are 8 translated works interpreted by various translators: Ven. Thích Trí Tịnh, Thích Trí Quang, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Thích Duy Lực, Thích Thanh Từ, academics Doan Trung Con, Nguyen Minh Tien and Monk Thích Giác Quả.
- Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita, 1 book, registered as 0236a, Shino version was translated by Bodhi Luu Chi of Nguyen dynasty.
- Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita, 1 book, registered as 0236b, Shino version was translated by Bodhi Luu Chi of Nguyen dynasty.
- Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita, 1 book, registered as 0237, Shino version was translated by Chan De of Tran dynasty.
- Nang doan Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita, 1 book, registered as 0238, Shino version was translated by Cap Da of Tuy dynasty.
- Buddha lectured on Nang doan Vajracchedika-prajñāparamita, 1 book, registered as 0239, Shino version was translated by Nghia Ting of Duong dynasty.
- That tuong prajñāparamita Sutra, 1 book, registered as 0240, Shino version was translated by Bodhi Luu Chi of Duong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Kim cương đánh Du già lý thú Bát nhã kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0241, Shino version was translated by Kim Coong Tri of Duong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Phật thuyết Biến chiếu Bát nhã Ba la mật kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0242, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- Phật thuyết Biến Chiếu Bát nhã Ba la mật kinh, 1 book, registered as 0242, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Đại lạc Kim cương Bất Không Chân thật Tam ma da kinh*, registered as 0243, Shino version was translated by Bat Khong of Duong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Thuyết Tối thượng căn bản Đại lạc Kim cương Bất không Tam muội Đại giáo Vương kinh*, registered as 0244, Shino version was translated by Phap Hien of Tong dynasty.
- *Phật thuyết Nhân vương Bát nhã Ba la mật kinh*, 2 books, registered as 0245, Shino version was translated by Cuu Ma La Thap of Post Tan dynasty.

- *Nhân vương Hộ quốc Bát nhã Ba la mật đa kinh*, 2 books, registered as 0246, Shino version was translated by Bat Khong of Duong dynasty.
- *Phật thuyết Liễu nghĩa Bát nhã Ba la mật đa kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0247, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Phật thuyết Ngũ thập tụng Thánh Bát nhã Ba la mật đa kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0248, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Phật thuyết Đế Thích Bát nhã Ba la mật đa tâm kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0249, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty.
- *Ma ha Bát nhã Ba la mật Đại minh chú kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0250, Shino version was translated by Cuu Ma La Thap of Dieu Tan dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Monk Nguyen Thanh of Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya Sūtra*, 1 book, registered as 0251, Shino version was translated by Huyen Trang of Duong dynasty. At present, there are a number of Vietnamese translated works including that of Monk Nguyen Thanh of Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Phổ biến Trí tạng Bát nhã Ba la mật đa Tâm kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0252, Shino version was translated by Phap Nguyet Trong of Duong dynasty. At present, Vietnamese version was translated by Monk Nguyen Thanh of Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya Sūtra*, 1 book, registered as 0252, Shino version was translated by Loi Ngon of Duong dynasty. At present, Vietnamese version was translated by Monk Nguyen Thanh of Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya Sūtra*, 1 book, registered as 0254, Shino version was translated by Tri Tue Luan of Duong dynasty. At present, there are a number of Vietnamese translated works including that of Monk Nguyen Thanh of Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya Sūtra*, 1 book, registered as 0255, Shino version was translated by Phap Thanh of Duong dynasty. At present, there are a number of Vietnamese translated works including that of Monk Nguyen Thanh of Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Đường - Phạn phiên đối tự âm Bát nhã Ba la mật đa Tâm kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0256, Shino version compared with Sanskrit was translated Thi Ho of Tong dynasty.
- *Phật thuyết Thánh Phật mẫu Bát nhã Ba la mật đa kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0256, registered as 0257, Shino version was translated by Thi Ho of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was translated by Monk Nguyen Thanh of Chau lam (Tue Quang) temple.
- *Phật thuyết Thánh Phật mẫu Tiểu tự Bát nhã Ba la mật đa kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0258, Shino version was translated by Thien tuc tai of Tong dynasty.

- *Phật thuyết Quán tưởng Phật mẫu Bát nhã Ba la mật đa Bồ tát kinh*, 1 book, registered as 0259, Shino version was translated by Thien Tuc Tai of Tong dynasty.
- *Phật thuyết Khai giác Tự tánh Bát nhã Ba la mật đa kinh*, 4 books, registered as 0261, Shino version was translated by Duy Tinh of Tong dynasty. Vietnamese version was done by Châu Lâm (Tuệ Quang) temple.
- *Đại thừa Lý thú Lục Ba la mật đa kinh*, 10 books, registered as 0261, Shino version was translated by Bat Nha of Duong dynasty. Vietnamese version was done by Ven. Thich tam Chau.
- Lakkhana in Agaham, Dai Chinh Chan Tu 02, translated by Thi Ho, page 500.
- Najjihima Nikaya, translated by Minh Chau, Van Hanh library published in 1975, page 252-259
- Vasubandhu, Kim Cang tien luan 1, Shino version translated by Bodhi Luu Chi, page 789a, Dai Chinh Tan Tu 25.
- Ly-Tran Literature, compiled by Institute of Literature, Volumn 1, Hanoi, Social Sciences Publisher, page 128.
- An overview from Phap Bao Dan Kinh of Hui Neng lectured at Nam Hoa (Bao Lam temple) in Tao Khe, Quang Dong province, China. Ven Thich Thien Hoa translated and lectured it at Institute of Hoa Dao, published by Vietnam Buddhist Shanga, Sai Gon, 1970.
- Ly-Tran Literature, compiled by Institute of Literature, Volumn 2, Hanoi, Social Sciences Publisher, 1988, page 27.
- Vong ThienThai tu: Viewing Thien Thai temple from a distance: Thien Thai mountain was located in the east of Hue Palace, crossed by a river without a path. In autumn, the old temple was behind the autumn leaves, an old monk of previous dynasty was under silver clouds loving himself unlucky fate, he was not in the same time with the mountain. Remembering last visit to this place seeing the Canh Hung bell (name of Le Hien Tong king from 1740 to 1786).
- Vong Tuong Son tu: Viewing Tuong Son temple from a distance: Vo Luong Buddha of Duong dynasty, in Tuong Son temple was his body. One night, that body got fired, thousands of years, the old temple became evening clouds. Ngu Ling mountain was colourful, Toan Chau fort and citadel were full of dust. On a small boat at a balcony looking at a range of cypress covered with the shadow of the night.
- Luong Chieu Minh was called Chieu Thong (502-556), a prince of Luong Vu De. Luong dynasty was one of the four dynasties of the South (Tong, Te, Luong, Tran), the prince was a son of Luong Vu De king (502-549). Both father and son followed Buddhism. In addition to printing holy texts, Chieu Minh was an author of famous literature collection. Luong Vu De (464-549, governed 502-549) was called Tieu Dien, Thuc Dat, Luyen Nhi, the first king of Luong dynasty of South – North dynasty in China's history. Vu De opened schools and expanded examinations, required elite officials' sons to study. He loved reading books, composed poems and support arts. Despite his oriental-Confucianism government, he folloed Buddhism and was attracted to Indian custom and culture. He banned animals sacrifice and execution. He was considered to perceive Buddhism's thought during his government, so he was called Bodhisettva king. At the end of his government, he paid an expensive cost due to his tolerate points of view to royal members and officials' corruption, as well as their lack of contribution to the country. When Hau Canh rebelled, Vu De received little support, hence Hau Canh occupied Kien Khang citadel,

controlled Vu De and Gian Van De and forced Luong into chaos. Luong Vu De died when he was being controlled. It was said that he died of hunger. Hau Canh was general of Dong Nguy, then surrendered Luong and after rebelled Luong; he rode a white horse pass Truong Giang river to fight Luong Vu De. When Hau Canh surrendered Luong, Dong Nguy king sent a letter to mentioning: “Afraid of So losing monkey, causing damage to forest; set fire to citadel gate, threaten to fish in the lake”. Dong Nguy correctly predicted Hau canh’s character, Luong king did not listen to the advice, hence collapsed.

- Hui Neng, *Phap bao dan kinh*, translated and lectured by Ven. Thich Thien Hoa, Hoa Dao Institute, published by Vietnam Buddhist Shanga, Sai Gon, 1970.

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4. www.phathoc.org
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